

Sam Moffatt

Christ the Manifestator  
John 4: 43-54

The second in this series of studies concerning the nature of Christ as portrayed by the miracles in John's gospel takes up the account of Jesus' second miracle, the healing of the nobleman's son. You will remember that the first miracle showed Christ the Man; that was the lesson of the marriage feast at Cana of Galilee. In this second miracle we have a picture of Christ the Manifestator, the Revealer of knowledge. He is the basis of Christian faith.

A certain nobleman--the Greek word basilikos would indicate an officer, either civil or military belonging to the court of Herod Antipas--approached Jesus at Cana, where he had worked his first miracle, and in desperation asked for the cure of his son who was sick unto death. Now since we are pointing out that the lesson of this miracle is one of faith and belief, it would be convenient to suppose that the officer was brought by a true, spiritual belief in Christ as the Son of God; but we will gain no real benefit by exaggerating the Biblical narrative. Jesus' first words to the man were, "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe." And those words would indicate that the nobleman came, ~~not in real belief, but~~ as any devout Jew might come to ask help and prayer from a Holy Man who had the reputation of being a miracle-worker. To be sure the officer had faith, or he would not have come at all, but the urgent request that Jesus come to Capernaum, a plea twice repeated, shows the imperfect character of his faith, a faith that admitted of cure only by personal presence, as if he regarded Christ just as a Rabbi specially endowed with power, or as a mere miracle-monger.

Whatever brought the nobleman to Jesus, it was not Christian faith; it was an imperfect faith. Perhaps he was just taking a chance

that Jesus might be able to help him in his need. Perhaps it was just a superstitious nature that brought him to seek help from a strange man who was reported to have strange gifts. Anyway, he came in doubt, but a few minutes with Jesus so changed him that he could set out for home joyfully, trusting boldly that his son was already well. What had happened? He had met the Master; he had found the Rock on which his faith might rest secure. Here is the central message of the miracle: faith is imperfect when it is founded on inadequate knowledge. Christian faith is based on an adequate knowledge of God through Christ who revealed Him. Faith is not blindfolded mysticism; it is not a gamble; it is not superstition.

It is strange to observe what queer ideas have developed concerning faith. I once listened to a man speak a full hour on the subject. He had the soul of a poet, and spoke eloquently, beautifully, pleading with us to have faith, only believe--but not once did he give us a clue as to what we were to have faith in. That is not faith; that is what I would call blind-folded mysticism. It is as if we were to close our eyes, shut off the workings of our intellects and move as in a dream. And that, he implied, was ~~with~~ living by faith. In point of fact, it is nothing but a weak retreat from reality. It makes faith a blind gamble.

Run through the great faith chapter, the 11th of Hebrews... "By faith Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain....By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death...By faith Noah..... By faith Abraham...." and on down through the roster of the Bible's Hall of Fame--heroes of the faith every one of them. Was their faith a gamble, a vague trust in something they didn't quite know what? Was it a shallow Pollyanna optimism that everything would turn out all right? It certainly was not. Faith must have an object. The faith of the 11th chapter of Hebrews is an unwavering faith in the Lord God Jehovah. It stands on the firm

foundation of God's promises. Faith is not a gamble.

Furthermore, faith is not superstition. Even superstition can be faith in an object. The Japanese worships his emperor; the savage trusts his idol of stone; the African his fetish of ostrich feathers. Even the American may put his faith in a Father Divine, or an Aimée Semple McPherson. All these are superstitious faiths of a sort, but Christian faith can be distinguished in two important ways from superstition: it is faith in a trustworthy object, and it is a faith that does not contradict reason, but is based on reason.

Christianity does not contradict reason.. During those tumultuous years at the close of the dark ages when the investigations of a few brilliant scientists like Copernicus and Galileo were roughly shaking up the corrupt, inaccurate church of the period, a few nimble thinkers began to teach there were two standards of truth. They favored a compromise between religion and science. When Columbus said the world was round and proved it, churchmen raised their hands in holy horror. "The world is flat," they cried. "The Bible says so. It speaks of the four corners of the earth." They refused to argue, they refused to investigate. Anyone who disagreed with them was branded a heretic. Then it was that those clever philosophers who advocated the double standard of truth sought to pour oil on the trouble waters by taking the easy way of the difficulty. They straddled the fence, and wrote, "Both the scientists and the priests are right; for what is true in the spiritual realm, can, in the scientific realm, be just as truly called false." It was an ingenious explanation, but it could not long be accepted. It might be nice for a while to believe that if the church called a cat white, and science declared it black, both might be right; but man's common sense will not long let him believe both sides .

of a contradiction. There is but one God; there can be but one standard of truth.

When science and the Bible disagree, there are two alternatives. I want you to remember these. First, as an individual Christian you are not infallible. You may have misinterpreted the scripture passage in question. Secondly, science may be at fault. It may have made a mistake in its calculations, or may be proceeding on a false assumption or theory. The illustration above concerning the flatness of the earth is a case of misinterpretation of the Bible.

As for science making mistakes in calculation, there was the error of the internationally famous Russian astronomer who announced in 1873 from his Pulkova Observatory near St. Petersburg that he had discovered "the dark companion of Procyon," a star whose existence had long been suspected. For many years he published his frequent observations of it, and then one day was shocked and humiliated to find that his famous dark star was only an imperfection in the lens of his telescope.

A case of science proceeding on a false theory, I believe, is the modern over-emphasis of the theory of evolution. The subject is controversial, and there are a great many consecrated Christians who believe in evolution in some form or another, but a great many others have found difficulty in reconciling the theory with the Biblical account of the creation. Of late, scientific faith in the theory seems to be weakening. First among recent discreditors of the theory have been the physicists and mathematicians, among them Dr. Arthur Helley Compton of the University of Chicago. Many of these say that evolution is physically impossible, violating among other laws of nature the second law of thermodynamics. They say the universe is running down, not winding up.

Zoologists countered, of course, to the effect that physicists and mathematicians were incompetent critics in the field of biology. But today even the biologists are wavering in their belief. My college professor of zoology, head of the department, who holds his Ph.D. from Ohio State University, tells his classes that the theory is outworn, but convenient for systematizing zoological data. However, as I say, the subject is controversial. The theory of evolution matters little; your faith in God matters a great deal. When Bible and science seem to disagree, this is the course for Christian faith: not a blind acceptance of what is read, but an intelligent, fearless survey of the facts, whether the difficulty prove to be misinterpreted scripture or scientific error. In the long run true science and true religious belief will always correspond. Remember that a faith that is afraid to look at facts, that is afraid the Bible will be proved wrong, is nothing but superstition.

Peter charges Christians:

"Be ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you."

Our faith is not only consistent with reason, it is based on fact. It has a reasonable foundation. I can have all the faith in the world that a liberal dose of arsenic will cure me of hay-fever, but it won't. It will kill me. In that case my faith is unreasonable; it has no basis in reality.

In this same way man cannot have faith in God if he has no knowledge of God, if he has nothing definite and real, nothing his intellect can comprehend concerning God. "Have faith in God" was the constant plea of the Hebrew prophets to the wayward children of Israel. But foolish, sinful Israel found it easier to trust in gods of wood which they could see, and idols of stone which they could feel, than to put their

faith in the Living God. They had not seen Him. What a pitiable excuse. They did not even have that excuse who put Jesus the Christ to death--the Pharisees, Pilate and Judas. For Christ too was God, but a God blind Bartimaeus could see, and a God doubting Thomas could handle.

Christ came into the world as the Manifestator and Revealer to give us the knowledge we need as the basis for our faith in God. Dr. McQuilkin tells the story of the southern salesman who came north for the first time in the dead of winter. He had never seen snow before, never seen ice, and found himself one day out in the country with a frozen river to cross. He stepped out on the ice gingerly, there was a slight crack, and he jumped back. He paused fearfully, and then was struck with the happy idea of getting down on hands and knees the better to distribute the weight of his body over the surface. As he was painfully inching his way across, all of a sudden he heard a great noise behind him, and turned around in alarm. There thundering across the smooth surface was a great wagon, piled high with wood, and drawn by two strapping black horses, galloping at full speed across the ice. Do you suppose that the southerner kept on his hands and knees? Of course not. He leaped to his feet and walked the rest of the way without another thought about the danger of the ice breaking.

Just as that salesman had to be taught that the ice was safe before he would trust it, so man had to be taught that God was adequate and trustworthy as the object of his faith. And Christ came to teach men that lesson. It was Christ who brought that doubting, desperate nobleman to his feet and sent him on his way rejoicing, secure in the knowledge that his son lived in that very hour. It was just one, fleeting vision of this Christ that banished forever all the doubts that flooded Paul's keen mind, and changed him from a fire-breathing, sword-bearing persecutor of the church,

into its most indefatigable, Spirit-filled missionary. It is in Christ, the reasonable, trustworthy basis of our faith, that we can live by faith.

Oh Christians, let's get off our hands and knees in spiritual progress. We're still crawling slowly over the surface of God's promises instead of standing boldly upon them. We're still crawling instead of pressing forth fearlessly for our Lord and Saviour. Let us no longer trust in God as though we were inching over thin ice. Get up and walk! Jesus Christ has shown us we stand upon the rock!

Encamped along the hills of light  
Ye Christian soldiers rise,  
And press the battle ere the night  
Shall veil the glowing skies.  
Against the foe in vales below  
Let all our strength be hurled;  
Faith is the victory, we know,  
That overcomes the world.

Faith is the victory!  
Faith is the victory!  
Oh, glorious victory  
That overcomes the world.